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## THE VICTORY PILLARS OF RAJENDRA CHOLA: MISSING FROM PEGU (MYANMAR), KEDAH (MALAYSIA) AND MAURITIUS

K.V. Ramakrishna Rao. ●

**Introduction:** In Indian context, the winning Kings used to erect "Jayastamba" or Victory Pillar to declare that he had conquered the area, land or city. This had been the practice of not only of the Kings, but also that of the "Kshatriyas" or the warriors. Sometimes, it had been of the nature of "Chakravarti Kshetra", where, the influence of the King was reportedly felt by others. Thus, the Cholas not only erected Victory pillars, but also, carried away pillars and sculptures as war mementos / victory trophies. C. Sivaramamurti gives the details about the Nolamba pillars brought by Rajendra from Hemavati, the Capital of Nolambas<sup>1</sup>: The fragments of carved pillar and fine perforated, decorated windows with exquisite carvings in greenish stone, the former lying strewn here and there and the latter fixed up in the walls of the long *mantapa* of the Brihadisvara Temple at Tanjavur form another evidence of samples of Nolamba sculpture brought home by him after his triumph over the Nolambas. He also pointed out the dwarapalaka from Kalyanapura found in Darasuram temple, one pillar found in the Kacheswara Temple, Kanchipuram<sup>2</sup> and few Kalinga and Pala images scattered in the Chela temples are additional evidences of Chela military triumph, but, it is the Gahadavala inscription that gives a clear written record of recovery, as he felt<sup>3</sup>. Here, in this paper, the victory pillars, he erected at Pegu (Myanmar), Kedah (Malaysia) and Mauritius are discussed.

**The Victory pillars of Rajendra Chola at Pegu, Myanmar (Burma):** Oflate, researchers like George Spencer cast doubt about the Rajendra Chola's overseas expedition, as such narrative has depended upon the "Prasasti" inscriptions. The conquest of Ceylon by Rajendra has not been denied by the researching scholars and historians as other archaeological evidences are available than the self-styled poetic inscriptions. Even George Spencer has been enthusiastically accepting the "plunder" of Lanka as the Buddhist Mahavamasa supported it<sup>4</sup>. That is, besides the

inscriptions of the Cholas, the literary work composed later acknowledged the sojourn of Rajendra. As for as Burma is concerned, the Jayastamba / Victory Pillars - two octagonal made of granite found at Pegu<sup>5</sup> / Burma erected by Rajendra Chola were reported in 1909. The Strait Times, a Singapore based newspaper reported as follows<sup>6</sup>: *"Two Pillars of Victory, which were found outside the town-hall of Pegu, India, are to be erected on a masonry pedestal in front of the District Court. They are believed to have been erected in 1025 and 1027 A. D. to commemorate the victory of Prince Rajendra Chola I, who overran Kidaram (Sanskrit, Kalaba), the ancient Falaing Kingdom of Ramananandam (Pegu)".* Taw Sein Ko (1864-1930), the Burmese first archaeologist noted<sup>7</sup> in 1913 about *"... a conspiracy of silence among native historians not to refer to anything relating to the invasion of their country by South Indians or other foreigners"*. He also added the opinion of Sir Arthur Phayre in this regard. Then, they were included in the list of protected monuments of Burma<sup>8</sup> in 1922 and therefore, Rajendra Chola reaching Burma has also not been denied and how he could have reached also not questioned. However, what happened to them thereafter, is not known. Here, he must have gone there by using the fleet of others as suggested above or moved his or supporting armies through the coastal areas to reach the destinations. Incidentally, where these "Victory pillars" have gone is not known.

The British Library says the photographs of the Rajendra Victory pillars were taken away by Taw Sein Ko: The British Library collection gives details that Jayastambha stone pillar was removed from the Thanatpin road along with a larger pillar and erected there in 1907-08, within the compound of the Circuit-house in the background, [Pegu] which was in the garden, the circuit-house in the background<sup>9</sup>. Thus, "The Straits Times" reported in 1909. The photographs, including views of Burmese

architecture, sculpture and relics, were taken under the direction of the Superintendent, a post held at the time by Taw Sein Ko<sup>10</sup>. Now, the whereabouts of the Victory Pillars are not known in spite of the enquiries made. Thus, now where the pillars and photographs of the pillars had gone is not known. In other words, Rajendra's conquest of Burma would be questioned as the evidence has gone missing. This is very similar to what had happened to the "Archaeological Report" prepared by R. K. Banerjee, about his discovery of chaitya below the Indus Valley Civilization level. But John Marshall did not publish and the typed papers were returned to him without photographs<sup>11</sup>. R.D. Banerjee found pre-Buddhist artefacts at the ruins at Mohenjo-Daro, that is, in one excavation, he found stupa like structure existing at the level of Indus Valley Civilization. As the Buddhist evidences went beyond Indus level, the British did not like and suppressed. Here, also, as Rajendra erected Victory pillars as evidence, perhaps the British or the Burmese Government did not want such proofs to exist.

**Burmese official documents differ before and after independence:** As the British separated Bengal, Burma was separated from India on April 1, 1937 and Burma got independence on January 4, 1948. With the establishment of Military rule from March 3, 1962 and thereafter, the history of Burma has been revised many times. Thus, the positions of the "Victory Pillars" in their documents vary from time to time. In 1916, they were included in the list of ancient monuments and the description given was<sup>12</sup>, "*A little to the north-east of the Shwehmawdaw Pagoda is a small hill, fabled to have been the resting place of two hamsa birds (Brahmani duck), when the region about Pegu was under the sea. At the foot of this hill are two octagonal pillars of fine granite. The length of one is about 11 feet, and that of the other about 5. They bear no inscriptions, but, a tradition is current that they were erected by Kala or Indians, who subsequently claimed the country as their own by virtue of pre-occupation, and that they were driven out by a Talaing*". The "Pillars of Victory" was reported to be in the "Compound of District

court". Taking clue from Forchhammer, it was pointed out that the "kalas" were "cholas" and their influence was there. The hill's name was given as "Hintha ridge" in the gazetteer, where, it was mentioned specifically that they were erected by the Cholas<sup>13</sup>.

**Rajendra Chola overran Pegu in 1025-1027 and erected Victory pillars at Pegu:** Taw Sein Ko, noted as follows<sup>14</sup>: "*On the Pegu-Thanatpin road two octagonal granite pillars, measuring about 11 and 5 feet, respectively, were found and one of them has been re-erected on a masonry plinth in the compound of the district court at Pegu. They may be identified with the Jayastambha or Pillars of Victory set up by Rajendra Chola I, who overran Pegu in 1025-1027 A. D., that is to say, a few years before the conquest of Thaton by Anawrata, King of Pagan. In the native chronicles, nothing is mentioned of Pegu for a period of 500 years from the 8th to the 13th centuries A.D., nor is there any reference, to it, during the Burmese invasion of the Talaing country by Anawrata. This omission can only be explained by its subjection to foreign rule, and the discovery of these two pillars, provided that the above identification is correct, fills up a gap in the Talaing records. There is a conspiracy of silence among native historians not to refer to anything relating to the invasion of their country by South Indians or other foreigners*". Then, he went on to quote Sir Arthur Phayre. "Such silence" appears to have been somewhat inexplicable to Sir Arthur Phayre, who attempts to explain it as follows<sup>15</sup>:

**List of the Kings of Pegu imperfect and Struggle between Brahmanists and Buddhists<sup>16</sup>:** "*In the appendix to this volume will be found a list of the first dynasty of the Kings of Pegu as entered in the Talaing chronicles. But that dynasty extends only to the year AD. 781, when the reign of King Titha or Tissa came to a close. From that time until the conquest of Pegu by Anawrata, that is, for about two hundred and sixty-nine years, no events are recorded in the Talaing annals. The conquest by the King of Pagan is not to be found therein. From indications in the Talaing annals as to the reigns*

of King Tissa and his predecessor, it appears probable that, for a long period, the country was disturbed by religious struggles, Brahmanical and Buddhist votaries contending for the mastery. Later chronicles have been unwilling to refer to the troubles and the degradation of their country caused by heretical disturbance and foreign rule, so that the course of events can only be conjectured. Coins or medals bearing Hindu symbols which have been found and which no doubt were struck in Pegu, probably belong to this period, and lend support to the conclusion as to events which the native chroniclers have obscured or suppressed<sup>17</sup>. Excepting a few vague sentences, no notice is taken in the Talaing chronicles of the conquest by Anawrata. Thus the native annals of Pegu, from the period when pure Buddhism was for a time restored under King Tissa, until the fall of the Pagan monarchy, near the close of the thirteenth century, a period of about 500 years are almost a blank." What Arthur Phayre pointed out is very important. Thus, he pointed out the following:

1. From 781CE to 1050 CE, for 269 years, the Talaing chronicles give no details.
2. Not only is that, till 13<sup>th</sup> century, 500 years of history missing from the chronicles.
3. There were religious struggles, heretical disturbance, Brahmanical and Buddhist votaries contending for mastery. Foreign rule were there during the period.
4. Though the temples constructed sculptures carved, coins found with Hindu symbols were found, the Talaing chronicles decided not to record anything about them.

Therefore, why the native historians want to suppress the historical past has to be analyzed.

**Was there any Brahminical-Buddhist struggle for power:** Though, the "*Brahmanical and Buddhist rivalry*;" was suspected for religious struggles, in

12<sup>th</sup> century, Brahmins were not there in Pegu to get involved, as the religious scriptures prevented them crossing oceans with strict injunctions. However, the Buddhist roles in trade, emissaries, battles etc., were noted. So also, thousands of Indian traders, sailors and warriors engaged in such transactions dealing with their Arab, Chinese and SEA counterparts. The fall of Nagapattinam Vihara was also for such reason only. The struggle could be between the Buddhists and Saivites or Vaishnavites, as some literary sources point to such possibility. For example, Thirumangai Alwar (8<sup>th</sup> cent. CE) was accused of stealing a golden Buddhist image from Nagapattinam monastery. However, here, 12<sup>th</sup> century events are discussed. Moreover, as the Brahmins could not have crossed ocean, in Pagan area, they could not have come in large numbers, that too, participating in struggles. The Talaing chronicles, obviously, did not like record anything about foreign victory, invasion etc. Moreover, the "heretical disturbance" point to "tantric" practices followed by non-Brahmanic groups, including Buddhists and Jains.

#### **Victory Pillars at Kedah, Malay found missing:**

Among the objects published by H. Q. Wales in his report was a stone pedestal found on the top of a small hill near the 44<sup>th</sup> mile stone on the road from Alor star to Butterworth in Malaya. It was in a buried condition and excavated out. The local people called "Raja Bersiong's fag-staff", perhaps, remembering one of the early Malay rulers of Kedah<sup>18</sup>. Wales dated it to 10<sup>th</sup> or 11<sup>th</sup> century CE. Mitchell Sullivan also tried to show<sup>19</sup> that, "*the pedestal must surely have been carved before 1027 CE, the date of the raid of the Chola King Rajendra I, which brought to Kedah nothing but destruction and was a blow from which little city state never recovered,*" implying that Rajendra was involved in attacking Srivijaya to teach a lesson, and not engaged in carving sculptures etc. However, he himself recorded that in early 1950s greater part of the hill at the spot Kedah was blown up with dynamite to provide material for the foundation of a bridge. Though, one shrine was noted, many items were missing. The locals informed him that thirty years ago (1920) there was an

inscription "in Siamese characters" visible on the pedestal found there, but, then, missing. While writing in 1957, he was mentioning Rajendra Chola and all in five-page write-up, whereas in his report running into 38-pages, he mentioned nothing about him. In his 1958-report, though, he recorded that the local people believed ships came upto the Muda river port in ancient times, and once a ship with gold sank in the river, he rejected it as a fable, but, accepted that small ships and barges could have landed there. But, as the super structure was missing and it was known as "flag-staff", it could have been a victory pillar erected by Rajendra Chola to mark his conquest of Srivijaya. Like the Pegu victory pillars, this pillar was also missing with pedestal remaining there. Therefore, it is intriguing to note as such missing evidences had been incidental or accidental or motivated.

**Victory Pillar at Mauritius also missing:** Similarly, in Mauritius also, a victory pillar erected by Rajaraja was mentioned, but, now, it is also missing<sup>20</sup>. Though, the Stanford University has been involved with "Mauritius Archaeology", they never mention anything about the Cholas. Therefore, the disappearance of victory pillars of Rajaraja and Rajendra at these places and downplaying the overseas expedition of Rajendra appears to be a systematic attempt to suppress historical facts, instead of giving different interpretation.

**Pagans and Lankans acting against the Cholas:** Anawratha (1044-77) mentioned as "Anuraddha" in Chulavamsa reportedly helped Lankan King Vijaya Bahu (1055-1110) with logistics to fight against the Cholas. Geok Yian Goh noted that, the former was said to have assisted the latter by sending gifts for motivating Sri Lankan troops into fighting the Cholas, thus, indicating that "Anuraddha" was a well-known in the geo-politics of Bay of Bengal<sup>21</sup>. The Chulavamsa also noted that the Cholas persecuted the Lankan Buddhists and therefore, Vijaya Bhahu invited contingent of Mon monks from Pagan kingdom<sup>22</sup>. Ironically, the Pagan kingdom had mostly Hindu paraphernalia in many aspects and the iconography, architecture

and other features prove the connection with India<sup>23</sup>. Therefore, it is intriguing as to how they aided and abetted with the Buddhists to fight against the Cholas. After the fall of the Pagan kingdom, the area was completely under the influence of Buddhism and hence, the sculptures are found in broken and mutilated conditions. They have been fitted with grills at site and others taken to the museum. This clearly shows the Buddhist-Hindu struggle taken place as noted by Sir Arthur Phayre.

**The relations of the Srivijayans, Chinese and Buddhists with the Palas:** The Srivijayan rulers sent a mission to the Pala court in Bengal in 9th century CE to expand their maritime network. In the 10th cent.CE, the Khmers also visited the Chandra Pala capital at Vikramapur, near Dhaka with commercial interests<sup>24</sup>. The Bhatara plaque<sup>25</sup> of the Chandra and the Khmer plaques had similar script, implying the cultural contacts. The Srivijayan king Balaputradeva financed the construction of Buddhist monasteries in eastern India<sup>26</sup>. The Srivijaya also funded for the Nagapattinam monastery in 1005 CE and the Chinese too intruded. The exchanges Srivijayan rulers with that of Southern Asia, as found in Indian inscriptions (Nalanda) reveal the intimate relations between the Srivijayan kings and Buddhist monks and Pala kings in Bengal. The Srivijayan ruler Dharanindravarman, is mentioned as a pupil of a monk from Bengal called Kumaraghosa. Another inscription from Nalanda records that the Srivijayan king Balaputradeva, who reigned in the middle of the ninth century, sent an envoy to the court of the Pala ruler Devapala requesting permission to endow a Buddhist monastery at Nalanda. Balaputradeva also petitioned for "a grant of five villages for its upkeep and maintenance". The Pala king is reported to have granted these requests of the Srivijayan king.

**The relations of the Srivijayans, Chinese and Buddhists with the Cholas:** The Srivijayan rulers also donated gifts to religious institutions located in the territories belonging to the Chola kingdom. In 1005, for example, the Srivijayan ruler Chudamanivarman financed the



construction of a Buddhist vihara at Nagapattinam, a leading Chola port. About 1015, a representative of the Srivijayan king presented precious stones to an idol in a temple in Nagapattinam. This was followed by a gift of lamps by a trader from Srivijaya. Sometime around 1018, a Srivijayan ruler mentioned as "the king of Kadram" offered gifts, including "Chinese gold" (cinakkanakam), to a temple in Nagapattinam. A stone tablet inscription dated to 1079, discovered at a Taoist monastery temple in Guangzhou, states that the temple's benefactor was the Chola King (Ti Hua Ka Lo), who was called the "lord of the land of Sanfozhi" (Srivijaya)<sup>27</sup>. As the Srivijayans were misrepresenting with the Chinese, they were confused them with that of Cholas and vice versa and subordinate to Srivijaya also.

**Why the Buddhist pursued vigorous conversion activities?:** Through Buddhists, the Chinese and Srivijayans wanted to get concessions from the Cholas, their reciprocity was not involved with any mutuality of commercial or religious interests. The Srivijayans were misrepresenting with the Chinese violating the commercial confidence vested and rested with them by the Cholas. Though, the Cholas sent many trade missions with gifts, they did not reciprocate mutually. The mysterious deaths of Cholas' ambassadors at Quanzhou was pointed out. The Pagan / Bagan Hindu converted Buddhist rulers were also against the Cholas hobnobbing with the Lankans. It is intriguing as to how the Bagan Kings were trying to convert the Cholas by all means. The Talaing inscription found at the Shwehsandaw Pagoda, Prome narrates as if the Chola King came to his court, submitting to him with the gifts and also ready offer his daughter to Pagan ruler, yet, the Pagan king wanted that the Chola should convert. Kyanzitha<sup>28</sup> who came to power in 1086, wrote to the Chola lord and *"the Chola cast off his adhesion to fake doctrine, and adhered straight away to the true doctrine.....and offer pearls, gems, together with a virgin daughter!"*

The case of Nathlaung Kyaung temple at Bagan:  
To understand the disappearance of

archaeological evidence in Pagan, the history of Burma / Myanmar has to be analyzed from the medieval to modern period, as the factors of culture, tradition, heritage and civilization have been changed, modified and converted to Buddhism and of course, erasing the past. Thus, the chronicles written in 18<sup>th</sup> - 19<sup>th</sup> centuries do not mention about the medieval period as Arthur Phayre pointed out. After 11<sup>th</sup> century, what happened in Burma has not been written in historical perspective, as sufficient materials were not available<sup>29</sup>. To cite one example, the case of Nathlaung Kyaung temple at Bagan is discussed. This has been the oldest extinct Hindu temple built by Anawratha or Nyaungu to Vishnu, with ten stone images representing "Dasavatara" with Buddha as ninth<sup>30</sup>. The temple was built by Indian artisans, stone workers and sculptors brought into Bagan in 11<sup>th</sup> century and the structure had been the model for other temples built in and around. The archaeological evidences found there prove that the original temple and its complex must have been in vast area spread with galleries, however, but, all disappeared and only the present structure remains with few Hindu images. Out of ten images, three are missing.

The decoding the myth behind the "shrine confining the spirits": The expression "nathlaung kyaung" in Burmese connotes, "shrine confining the spirits", implying some oppressive acts had taken place around the temple. According to one legend, the temple was built to store all "nath" from other temples, so that the Buddhism could dominate and get established. Thus, when Buddhism had overtaken, the Hindu temples were obviously either destroyed or converted into Buddhist temples. When the Buddhists started demolishing the temples, the Hindus might have brought the worshipping idols from the Garba gruha and kept in Nathlaung Kyaung temple for safety or the temple there could not be destroyed completely and thus left as such in the modified form. In any case, the Buddhist-Hindu encounter was there with the persecution of Hindus and thus, the antagonism developed and nurtured could have been the reason for the removal of Rajendra Chola Victory pillars from

the Pegu-Thanatpin Road to the Circuit house or the District court, but, now reportedly missing.

**Conclusion:** The overseas expedition and maritime activities of the Cholas as recorded in the inscriptions cannot be simply brushed aside as poetic fantasy, self- glorification or over-emphasized victory, as interpreted by some researchers, as they have failed to take many other material evidences found at different countries. Casting doubt and arresting research is not right research methodology, as such tactics could be to suppress the facts. Here, some specific examples of Victory Pillars erected by Rajendra Chola at Pegu (Myanmar), Kedah (Malaysia) and Mauritius have been pointed out and discussed. The tragedy and danger of

disappearance of evidences have also. pointed out. The existence of such material evidences with correlative, corroborative and corresponding proofs confirm and establish the Rajendra Chola's presence there. As the geographical boundaries of countries change, borders of states and provinces alter, the belief-system of people get converted, the policies and ideologies of the governments vary, the history, historiography and research methodology also change not only from country to country, but within country, due to variance pointed out. Therefore, to understand and comprehend the past and even, just past has to be studied carefully, as the researcher has to overcome all such barriers to get the truth.

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## DLA CONFERENCE: A STUDY ON THE PAPERS PRESENTED

### Ramanathan. P

Certain important recent (June 2016) findings of eminent scholars of **Indus Civilization** I. Mahadevan and R.Balakrishnan – of interest to historians of South India; as well as the views of other historians like R.Chakravarthi (2010) and similar views of percipient earlier scholars like H.R.Hall. (1913), Gilbert Slater (1924), P.T.Srinivasa Iyengar, Maraimalaiadigal, Kunhan Raja, S.K.Chatteriji and Walter Fair servis.

This paper brings to the notice of historians of South India, the remarkable findings contained in their papers presented at the **44<sup>th</sup> DLA conference at Hyderabad**, in June 2016, of the eminent scholars of Indus civilization: **I.Mahadevan**: "The Indus civilization which endured for more than a millennium did not simply vanish. Its vestiges must exist in the bilingual (Dravidian and Indo-Aryan) streams of the Indian historical tradition, which has continued without interruption till the present:" **R.Balakrishnan**: "Indian toponyms, historical and current, can unravel the mysteries of Indus civilization... and help unravel the language(s) of Indus civilization..., remnants of Indus legacy are traceable in contemporary Indian societies... the cockfight tradition being one of them. It also refers to the underpinning of these ideas by Ranbir Chakravarti in his 2010 work *Exploring Early India upto AD 1300*". Also recent views of eminent linguists engaged in "Mother Tongue / Nostratic macrofamily"

studies on the **antiquity of the Dravidian language family**.

My paper at the **34<sup>th</sup> SIHC Poondi in March 2014** contained a succinct summary of the Dravidian provenance of the Indus civilization (Mature phase 3200 BC-1800BC) and the Dravidian affiliation of its language and script (on 3000+ Indus seals) and its culture – [vide pages 783-786 of the proceedings of the 34<sup>th</sup> session]. for the benefit of historians of South India, the further astute & major findings of the eminent **INDUS CIVILISATION** scholars I.Mahadevan and R.Balakrishnan, in this rare field, presented at the 11<sup>th</sup> conference of the Dravidian Linguists Association in June 2016 at the University of Hyderabad.

2. Before summarizing those findings, it is necessary to know, that even earlier than 1924, (when the Indus civilization became known after the excavations at Mohenjodero and Harappa) perspicuous scholars had pointed out that before the intrusion of Indo-Aryan speakers in small numbers into India about 1700 BC, there ought to have existed a pan-Indian Dravidian civilization of a high order, which constitutes even now the staple of the Indian civilization and culture; and that not only the **"Dravidian Languages"** as commonly known-- even the so called **Indo Aryan Languages** like Hindi, Gujarati, Maharatti, Bengali etc. have a substratum of Dravidian